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CUBAN SMOKE

Over the past three decades Fidel Castro and the movement he leads have enjoyed tremendous prestige within the international revolutionary movement, and especially in Latin America.

The reasons are not hard to find:

☐ Fidel was a daring and resourceful revolutionary who always spit in the eye of the enemy. He seemed to know what to do. He won power through armed struggle, and destroyed the notorious torturers and oppressors of the people. He used the force of the state to defeat U.S. imperialism and the Cuban reactionaries who attacked the revolution. For these reasons, he won the love of the Cuban working people.

☐ Fidel gave moral and material support to other insurgent national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. So millions who hated US imperialism saw Fidel

as their hero and spokesperson.

☐ Fidel defiantly declared the Cuban revolution to be "communist," and proceeded to implement a series of social and economic reforms that gave Cubans one of the highest living standards in the hemisphere.

(By contrast, the Communist Parties, who had been the traditional leaders of the continent's oppressed, were played out. They had no strategic direction. Having long since given up on armed insurrection, they had no idea how to bring the working class to power. They were part of the Establishment, playing the game of elections, union organizing and reformist power brokering.)

All-in-all, anti-imperialists all over the world have looked on Cuba as a model of how the struggle against imperialism and the establishment of socialism should be carried out. And now many have heard Fidel's speeches attacking perestroika in the Soviet Union and think Fidel represents the left wing of the world communist movement.

It is a good image, worthy of respect. But what is the reality behind the image? That is what this article is about.

This article will show that, no matter what the image is, Castro and the Cuban revolution have never been on the left wing of anything, and they aren't now either.

OUR MAIN POINTS, BRIEFLY STATED:

•Fidel and his group were never revolutionary communists, neither in ideology nor in practice. They were never animated by more than the pipe dreams of the European bourgeoisie, and desired nothing better than to bring those dreams to life in an independent Cuba.

•Their radical nationalism has its ideological roots in 19th century German romanticism—a way of thinking that emphasizes preserving the traditional values of "the people." But these are values, forced on the people by past ruling classes, which guarantee the complete dependence of the people upon despotic rulers. (All modern nationalisms—socialist "progressive" nat ionalism, pan-Arabism, pan-Slavism, pan-Germanism, etc.—share this foundation.)

•Fidel and his group always were (and they remain) liberal capitalist reformers. The society they lead has never advanced beyond capitalism. Cuba leads a market-driven, imperialist-determined, imperialist-dominated economic and social life despite Fidel's anti-imperialist, anti-market speeches. It is a sad irony, but his radical nationalism was what forced Fidel to become imperialism's chief Cuban agent. If he had been a communist, he could have avoided that disgrace.

•The "Communist" movement Castro declared himself part of in 1961 was just that part of a disintegrating movement that was then openly renouncing communism. In that gang (of which he is the last survivor) there was no Left.

•The "Marxism-Leninism" Castro announced he had embraced was a "Marxism-Leninism" purged of all its content, all its revolutionary communist ideas. It is a disgusting concoction brewed by state capitalists to justify their fascist-like control of society. The ideology and politics of the various class forces in the Cuban revolution, and their relationship to each other, prevented the Cuban workers from advancing to communism.

For Fidel and his group, the art of governing lies in making whatever self-serving choice circumstances seem to require, and then covering everything in an ideological disguise. In Cuba under Fidel, ideology (not religion or chemistry) is used to drug the masses.

The Cuban revolution's prestige is based on mistaking words with deeds. Its current crisis is a crisis of nationalist politics, not a crisis of communism.

FIDEL'S PROGRESS: ANTI-COMMUNIST TO 'MARXIST-LENINIST'

1. Getting Power

Fidel is the son of a poor Spanish immigrant to Cuba who became a rich farmer. Fidel was sent to private schools and eventually to Havana University. There he became the most prominent anti-communist student leader, leading the university wing of the "Partido del Pueblo Cubano" (known as the "Ortodoxos") which was an anti-corruption, ("clean government,"), populist, nationalist, anti-communist party. After graduating as a lawyer, Fidel went into tenant organizing in Havana. He decided to run as an Ortodoxo candidate for the Cuban Congress in 1952, but Batista's coup on March 10, 1952 canceled the election.

Fidel immediately set himself the task of organizing a group to overthrow the dictator by force. (He was not alone—other groups were being formed.) In his first attempt, on July 26, 1953, Fidel led 165 men and two women in

Nearly the entire Rebel Army assembled in early 1957.

an armed attack on the Moncada army post (the Cuban army's second largest base, and the key to controlling eastern Cuba) in Santiago de Cuba. Fidel expected a popular uprising to greet his capture of Moncada. That was his plan. But the attack failed, and there was no uprising. Fidel was captured a few days later, tried and sentenced to a long jail term. At his trial he delivered a speech which became famous as "La Historia Me Absolvera" ("History Will Absolve Me.") In this speech he sketched a reformist bourgeois political program, completely within the Ortodoxo tradition. This remained his program until well after his seizure of power.

In December, 1955 he was freed by Batista, and left at once for Mexico where he began to organize a new attempt to overthrow the dictator.

A year later, in December 1956, Fidel headed back to Cuba aboard a private yacht named the "Granma." He was leading the 81 revolutionary soldiers of a new group he called the "July 26 Movement" in honor of his first attempt. With this armed nucleus he planned to challenge the 80,000 soldiers of the dictatorship.

The landing operation was a military fiasco. Batista had been tipped off, and his troops were waiting. Only 12 revolutionaries

managed to escape, somehow getting to the nearby Sierra Maestra mountains. (This was neither the desired plan nor the contingency plan. The possibility of this disaster was completely unforeseen and unplanned for.) But this remnant, led by Fidel, began to wage a guerrilla war against the Batista government. Batista responded by unleashing a reign of terror and torture throughout Cuba.

By mid-1958 about 3,000 insurgents were part of Fidel's "26 of July Movement Rebel Armed Forces," fighting the government in eastern Cuba. Other, smaller armed groups, belonging to other political groups, were in the field against Batista in other parts of the country. Popular unrest grew to fever pitch throughout Cuba. By October the government was tottering on its last legs, and rumors of coups and plots flew thick and fast.

By mid-December, an offensive being led by Che Guevara, Fidel's most trusted and most competent companion, effectively cut the island in two at the midpoint, isolating east from west. This convinced Batista to pack his plane with gold, tip off a few cronies, and flee to Ciudad Trujillo (as the capital of Santo Domingo was then called), Miami and Madrid. On January 1, 1959 Fidel announced the power was now his, and, hailed as a liberator by virtually the whole Cuban people, he marched triumphantly across Cuba at the head of a column of his troops, reaching Havana on January 8, 1959.

2. Complicated Politics Of Fidel's Radical "Good Government" Reform Movement

Now a complicated political situation developed, as Fidel tried to implement the reforms he had promised, while holding together the anti-communist bourgeois coalition represented by his "July 26 Movement."

So, on the one hand, shortly after entering Havana, Castro made a pilgrimage to the tomb of his old Ortodoxo leader, the anti-communist Eduardo Chibas, and declared that the 26th of July Movement "was the continuation of the work of Chibas, the harvest of the seed that he planted in our people." (*Bohemia*, January 18-25, 1959, p 105). He then appointed a government almost wholly drawn from the old bourgeois ruling groups. In case anyone failed to understand him, on April 23, 1959 he said that fascism, Peronism, and communism were all merely different kinds of "totalitarianism". And on May 21, 1959, he talked of communism as a system "which

solves the economic problems, but which suppresses liberties, the liberties which are so dear to Man, and which I know the Cuban people feel."

On the other hand, he tried to carry out the populist reforms outlined in "History Will Absolve Me." He proposed, for example, to freeze prices, cut taxes, reduce rents, stop importing luxury goods, expel the Mafia gangsters who controlled Havana and ran its gambling, drugs and commercial sex rackets (around which the whole Cuban tourist industry was built) and close down their rackets, and implement a land reform.

These reforms would threaten *some* of the profits of those U.S. business interests which controlled the Cuban economy lock, stock and barrel. For these companies (who were not used to getting less than 100% of what they wanted, all the time) this was nothing but the horror of communism. The U.S. government backed up the U.S. companies and threatened to retaliate against Cuba if Castro implemented his reforms. Fidel answered this "insolence" (as he termed the U.S. threats) by threatening not merely to implement reforms, but to expropriate the U.S. corporations' properties if the U.S government retaliated.

One thing led to another.

To give himself some freedom of maneuver Fidel bought a boatload of arms and ammunition from Belgium. So when the ship arrived in Havana harbor, the CIA blew it up, killing dozens of port workers in the process.

The Western oil companies refused to sell him crude oil. So Castro bought a tanker-load from Moscow. Then the oil-company-owned refineries refused to process it. And so Castro seized the local refineries.

So it went. In short order, the U.S. government had slapped a total economic embargo on Cuba, and was busily organizing an invasion to overthrow Castro; while Fidel for his part had not only enacted his reforms, but had nationalized all the U.S. companies in Cuba.

While this was going on the old-line politicians (who could not effectively oppose Fidel, and increasingly saw little reason to support him) who cared about having political power only to the extent they could use it to enrich themselves and protect their cronies, deserted Fidel's coalition and left for Miami. Fighting (especially fighting the U.S.) and being called "communist"—this was more than they were made for. Soon virtually the entire Cuban urban and commercial bourgeoisie—several hundred thousand strong—had emigrated.

3. The Turn To Moscow

As the U.S. government turned the economic screws on him, Castro had to find a new trading partner, because the immediate improvement of material living conditions, coupled with general economic development, were—and are—the essence of his revolutionary nationalist-reformist politics.

He was prepared to break with U.S. imperialism—this was the hallmark of his radicalism—but only on condition that he would be embraced by another bloc. The limitations of his radical nationalism barred him from considering the path a communist would have adopted, the path of self-sufficient economic development.

A policy of self-sufficient economic development would guarantee the revolution could not be destroyed by the powerful world market economic forces the imperialists control and can manipulate.

Self-sufficient economic development removes the country from the world market, and suppresses the domestic free market. This is the only way to keep the imperialists' hands off the revolution.

For Cuba, breaking with the world market would have had the immediate effect of lowering material living conditions generally, although not for the most oppressed workers and farmers (who could scarcely live more poorly.) These classes would have had to be the base and leaders of the revolution were this policy to be carried out successfully.

This general lowering of material living conditions would have been an immediate effect, but it would not have been long-lasting condition. But, no matter how briefly it might have lasted, this was precisely what Fidel didn't want at all.

Also, to break with the world market, and suppress the domestic market, requires a total reorganization of social and production relations. But revolutionizing the relations of production was something wholly outside the fidelista understanding.

So, all-in-all, a communist strategy for revolution and for economic development could not produce the desired fidelista results.

4. Moscow's Interest

For its own reasons Moscow beckoned, and Fidel turned to Moscow.

In those days the Soviet Union

was ruled by a self-confident group of expansionist-minded state capitalists led by Nikita Khrushchev. They had consolidated their power in 1957 with a huge purge of their considerable opposition. They then officially and openly scuttled the Soviet Union's communist program by renouncing the goal of a working class dictatorship over society. They followed up by unashamedly changing the Communist Party of the Soviet Union from being a group claiming to act in the interests of the working class into a group that denied the working class had any class interests. In reality they wanted to supplant U.S. imperialism's dominance of the world market with their own. To help them achieve this end they needed to hide it. They wished to present themselves as more "anti-imperialist" than anyone else claiming to be communist (the Chinese, for example). So they were delighted to have a chance to challenge the U.S. government right on its own doorstep.

THE OLD CUBAN CP: OPPORTUNISM FINALLY REWARDED

As his bourgeois allies deserted him, Fidel was forced to patch things up with the only other nationally organized political force in the country, his old enemy, the Cuban Communist Party.

Founded in 1925, the Cuban Communist Party became one of the biggest and most influential in Latin America, with a significant mass base in the working class (especially among the sugar cane workers) and in the petty bourgeoisie. But from its formative years on its leadership was under the guidance and supervision of the leaders of the U.S. Communist Party, which was perhaps the least communist and most anti-revolutionary of any party leadership claiming to belong to the Marxist-Leninist tradition. (They were the only Communist Party leaders in the world who dissolved their own organization in order to bring about a united front (!) with their bourgeois rivals.)

Long before Fidel became politically active, the Cuban Communist Party had completely abandoned any idea of armed struggle, or of communism. It concocted a theoretical justification for its treachery to the Cuban working class called "geographic determinism." This theory held that because the U.S. was only 90 miles away, the Cuban communists could achieve nothing the U.S. government would not stand for. Following the logic of this theory, the party changed its name in 1940 from "Communist" to "Revolutionary Union." That

apparently was too radical, so in 1944 it became the "Popular Socialist Party."

The PSP thoroughly disapproved of Castro, in whom the leadership saw a great, uncontrollable danger. After the 1953 Moncada attack the PSP issued a statement saying :

> We repudiate the putschist methods, peculiar to bourgeois political factions, of the action in Santiago de Cuba and Bayamo, which was an adventurist attempt to attack both military headquarters. The heroism displayed by the participants in this action is false and sterile, as it is guided by mistaken bourgeois conceptions.

The disavowal didn't help the PSP. Batista had been the Revolutionary Union presidential candidate in 1940. At that time he appointed PSP leaders to cabinet seats, and handed control of the Cuban union federation to the PSP. Now he proceeded to suppress the PSP newspaper and outlaw the party. That is what the U.S. required. Cooperation with communists, which Roosevelt had to put up with during World War II, Eisenhower refused to tolerate. The Cuban bourgeoisie was governed by "geographic determinism."

Nor did the PSP approve of Castro's "Granma" expedition. In a *Letter of the National Committee of the Popular Socialist Party to the 26th of July Movement,* dated February 28, 1957, the PSP leaders expressed their "radical disagreement with the tactics and plans" put forward by Fidel.

But even from its beginning—and increasingly as Fidel's guerrilla war got stronger and more popular—younger, more radical PSP members joined the armed struggle without PSP authorization, or even against orders. In many respects the July 26 guerrilla movement depended on the PSP base in the countryside. (Che Guevara wrote to Fidel while on the march to central Cuba in 1958:

> We couldn't establish contact with the 26th of July organization, since a couple of supposed members refused to help when I asked, and I only got it—money, rain gear, some shoes, medicines, food, and guides—from members of the PSP, who told me they had asked for help from the groups in the [July 26] Movement and received the following answer...: "If Che sends a request in writing, we'll help him; if not he can go fuck himself.)

The PSP ranks began to exert pressure on the leadership to support Fidel, and the leadership ordered a number of its cadres to join Fidel in the Sierra.

Still, the PSP leadership did not support the general strike called by the July 26th Movement on April 9, 1958. Largely as a result

of the PSP holding back, the strike was a failure. This failure emboldened Batista to try to wipe Fidel out once and for all by launching a major offensive in the Sierra. (Fidel had only about 300 ill-armed soldiers at that time.)

Having sabotaged the strike, thereby objectively strengthening Batista, the National Committee of the PSP then took its next step to "help" Fidel by issuing a truly looney statement June 28, 1958 which called for an end to violence and for a negotiated settlement to the war "by means of democratic and clean elections, respected by all, by which the people can effectively decide by means of the vote and the results of which would be honorably respected." (This is almost to the word exactly the same as the line announced in 1991 by Villalobos, traitorous leader of the Salvadoran FMLN, whom Castro supports.)

It was too late for such opportunism. The guerrillas were able to defeat Batista's offensive and as a consequence grew bigger and more popular, and six months later, had won the war and political power. But within nine months of winning power Fidel unexpectedly discovered he needed the help of the PSP to exercise that power, and the PSP leaders, "revolutionaries" outside the revolution, were dying to oblige.

So in the next year—1960—the three willing partners—Fidel, Khrushchev and the PSP—worked quickly to draw closer together and unite the July 26 Movement with the PSP. When the U.S. invaded with its mercenary army at the Bay of Pigs on April 15, 1961, Fidel taunted Kennedy, and informed Cuba, that the revolution was now "socialist" and he himself was now a "Marxist-Leninist"! (He somewhat bewilderingly "explained" that he hadn't mentioned it before because on the one hand he had been a victim of "imperialist propaganda," and on the other hand because "the proclamation of socialism in the period of the insurrectional struggle would not have been understood by the people", although the "main leaders" —meaning Fidel, who was always the only leader—always intended socialism.)

THE KEY MATTER: WHO DECIDES?

The purpose of a communist organization is to lead struggles which liberate workers from the condition of being things to be bought and sold, so that they may acquire fully the status of being free men and women.

With communism the conditions exist for humanity to live

freely and produce enough so there is a world of abundance for all to share. That is the purpose of communism. Without communism both mass freedom and a life of abundance for all are impossible.

What is the difference between communism and the socialism that united Fidel, Khrushchev and the leaders of the PSP, and to which they were now going to subject the Cuban working people?

1. Fidel's Impossible Dream

☐ These three conjured up for the people a wholly imaginary socialism as a society supposedly evolving in a harmonious way with gradually achieved technical and economic advances. Their main aim was that real class struggle should not be permitted to disturb this imaginary harmonious economic development. That is why they constantly preached "Unity! Unity! Unity!" But since in the real socialist world there were class divisions and class struggles, all who bought this dream merely doomed themselves to a false consciousness about their real situation.

☐ In their socialist scale of values industry was favored over agriculture.

☐ Their socialism was committed to increasing production on the solid capitalist basis of increasing worker productivity and by accumulating capital. That was the main thing.

☐ In their socialism the workers were instruments to be used for increasing production, and especially for increasing productivity and profits.

☐ Their socialism was based on imposing sacrifices on workers, with rigid discipline in production as a primary goal, the discipline underpinned by higher pay for greater competence.

Restructuring the existing production relations (which is the way the struggle for communism is carried on) and satisfying the working class' need for political power was on no socialist agenda. (They permitted no one to know that the purpose of communism is not profit, but the liberation of the working class *from* profit.)

Emphasizing productivity leads, of course, to a concern with education and health. A modern economy needs a healthy, educated workforce. But this is education of a particular type. On one side, there is education to produce scientific, cultural and

managerial skills; that is, high-level education for the elite. On the other side there is education to inculcate in workers a sense of order and discipline and respect for hierarchy.

Fidel's unchanging vision—both before he called it socialism, and afterward as well—was of an anti-corruptionpolitical administration, centralized power granting broader freedoms to the cultured, greater scope for the scientific and cultural elites, and an assertive national identity. And with the addition of an alliance with the Soviet Union, this is just what the PSP leaders supported.

In short, their shared vision of socialism was economic growth directed by an elite for the good of the people. This sounds benign, but it never fails to result in ruthless oppression. This is not communism, nor does it—nor can it—lead to communism. It stands opposed to communism. For the Cuban workers, communist liberation from this "actually existing socialism" can only be found through a struggle against the party calling itself "Communist."

2. The Communist Program

The Cuban working people needed—and still need—an entirely different kind of society than the one envisioned by Fidel and the PSP.

- ***The working people need a society under their own control and operating in their interests;***
- **a society with fully socially integrated production, not commodity production;**
- **a society with egalitarianism in the distribution of rights, not privileged groups;**
- **a society scrapping work divisions and the labor market, not continuing the division between creative intellectual labor and rote mechanical labor;**
- **a society with democratic centralism, not despotic corporate centralism;**
- **a society with mass education, not elite training.**

"Guillermo Garcia is a hero of the Revolution, the first peasant to join Fidel's forces in the Sierra Maestra. Today...a charter member of Cuba's eleven-man politburo...I ask Guillermo if there ever were discussions about political ideology while they were in the mountains.

"Chico, who had time for that? For all of us there was only one thing on our minds. To beat Batista. ...We let Fidel do our thinking for us."(Castro's Cuba, Lee Lockwood, Random House, 1969, page 23)

This is a program that never was articulated within the Cuban revolution.

Socialism does not lead in the direction of these workers' needs. This is why communist workers cannot fail to reject socialism, even for the limited purpose of building the economy.

Fidel and his group never carried out any struggles for these communist goals because to them it was all irrelevant.[1]

In terms of the working class' need to free itself by revolutionizing production relations, the important question is: **"Who decides how the means of production are going to be used, the majority who work or the minority who stand apart from production?"**

This question—***"who decides?"***—has nothing to do with how much is being produced. That is a different matter. The forms within which production and development are carried on are not products of the production process. These forms are products of class struggle.

Therefore, for the working class a critical matter is the *nature* of the factory or enterprise they work in. Is it primarily a production unit, or is it the basis of the proletarian dictatorship?

The capitalists can lose state power but capitalist production relations will continue if the production process doesn't change through a complete transformation of social relationships. Merely placing new faces in old roles, as the Cuban revolution did, doesn't change production relations. In fact, capitalist style management is one of the objective basis for the existence of the bourgeoisie.

Tinkering with "management

1 Che Guevara seemed to stand apart from the rest. Che became famous for briefly carrying on a campaign to use moral incentives, that is, a maximum of ethical pressure, rather than material incentives, to motivate workers to increase their productivity within the existing production forms. But this merely romanticized the actually existing capitalist social relations, and helped disguise the fact that the workers remained at the traditional level of dependency. Not only did it not underminethe actual production relations, it helped strengthen and perpetuate them. Anyway, Che's very words, "political conscience," proved too radical, no matter what they disguised, and Che soon left Cuba for good.

techniques" (a never-ending preoccupation of the Cubans, who currently are trying to adapt Japanese capitalism's "democratic formulas" of labor relations, according to Carlos Aldana, the Cuban party's official ideologist) is not the same thing as transforming industrial management. Work rules possess a class character.

HOW COMMUNIST'S SEE THE WORK OF THE WORKERS' PARTY

Experience proves that if the working class is really to control the means of production in the interest of the whole class, it requires the intermediary of a ruling proletarian political party. The line of the ruling party directs the class struggle. Therefore the party line becomes the main factor in making it possible to reject capitalist forms of management.

But this will happen only if this ruling party is the instrument of the ideological and political unity of the working class. To be such an instrument, the party must be the carrier of revolutionary Marxism-Leninism, the proletarian ideology.

Success for the party lies in ensuring that the masses of people make this Marxist-Leninist ideology their own through their own social practice. This goal requires that the party be of the masses, must be a part of the inner life of the masses, and not merely be "for" the masses—that is, that it not be a group apart from the masses, but commanding mass support (as was the July 26 Movement.)

Mass support for the party does not necessarily mean the masses have made proletarian ideology their own, or that their social practice is no longer dominated by bourgeois ideology (especially in production.)

The aim of communism is the unification of social life. This is done by ending class divisions within society. But the working class is itself divided by class society, and these divisions must also be overcome. The communists struggle to unite the working class in ideas, perceptions and action through a struggle over ideas and a social practice that requires individual and particular interests to be subordinated to collective interests. People have to come to agree that the collective interest comes first.

Such a way of thinking cannot be forced on people. But, however long it takes to develop, ***until this unity is forged the working class cannot directly control the means of production in its own class interest. It requires the state for this purpose.***

None of the previous developments of human society—the transition from primitive communism to slavery, from slavery to feudalism, from feudalism to capitalism—required that the masses of exploited workers be conscious of their class interests. On the contrary, the more ignorant the masses, the better for the particular aspiring ruling class at a given point in history.

Those earlier transitions' main requirement was a conscious and organized ascending ruling class. In this respect only, the transition to communism is no different. Since the working class is the ascending ruling class of the future, society's future transition requires, and waits upon, a conscious and organized working class.

The big difference is that previously ascending ruling classes were tiny minorities. The working class is billions. For the working class to establish communism, millions of workers have to be won to the ideas and social practice of building an egalitarian society based on the communist principle of "from each according to his/her commitment, to each according to his/her need." Nothing else will do. Fidel's political theory—as expressed in his traditional slogan: "Commander in Chief—Give Us Our Orders!"—is all wrong.

HOW FIDELISTAS MEASURE SUCCESS

We are interested in the Cuban revolution only for one reason—to see whether the path it took helped create the new kind of modern society we are fighting for (one of worker solidarity and cooperation) or whether its path obstructed the creation of such a society. We are interested in Cuba's economic development only to the extent it has some bearing on this matter. ***Economic development is a by-product, not a purpose, of the communist revolution.***

Fidel and his group, however, defined socialism and the revolution's success solely in terms of increasing productivity and production. Production, Fidel said in 1965, was "a point of honor...a yardstick by which to measure the capability of the revolution." Failure in production meant the Cuban people would "cease being revolutionaries." (From his standpoint this made good sense, since the purpose of his revolution was to improve material living standards.)

But this definition of "revolutionary" is implicitly an attack on the Cuban working people because it demands of

them that they define their self-worth in terms of their agreement to excel as slaves, to excel as part of a production process they don't control.

Nothing could come of this but that the working class would ultimately reject communism: a rejection of the revolution's allegedly communist, but really exploitative, content. This is precisely what happened in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, and now we have to examine how this process developed in Cuba.

EXPORT! EXPORT!

As a result of the Revolution's initial populist economic reforms the purchasing power of the lower middle class and of the working people grew. Between 1959-1961 there was a growing demand for consumer goods. People were able to buy the things the bourgeoisie had taught them to want, but which they couldn't afford under the old regime. (Meanwhile, most Cubans were ill-fed, ill-housed, and ill-dressed, and what was being produced, taken as a whole, ill-suited their needs.) Nevertheless, employment and production expanded in order to meet the new demand. The production growth was mainly achieved by better utilizing the already existing productive capacity, which had been created in the first place to meet bourgeois tastes.

(The capitalists who ran Cuba prior to Castro limited the use of the productive capacity of their plants, as all capitalists do, to turn out no more than what they could sell on the market. In the US today, for example, the capitalists use only about 70% of capacity.)

By 1962 the economic stimulus of the reforms had reached its limit. Full plant capacity had been reached. To produce more such goods required building more facilities for production. More power had to be generated—which the Cubans understood to mean building more big coal or oil burning electric generating plants. More transmission lines were needed. More roads. Castro wasn't leading a movement which could tackle such projects on a voluntary, decentralized basis, making use of local materials and local know-how. He was forced to rely on the capitalist approach of using capital in its form as money.

But Castro did not have the required money. The government had spent a great deal on social programs and on defense. The U.S. embargo made imported things more expensive. Because of the embargo, U.S. equipment that broke down could not be repaired. It had to

be replaced with entirely new Soviet equipment. And Soviet equipment was expensive. The capitalist Soviet Union and its bloc would not underwrite the political changes in Cuba free of charge. So in order to pay for imported goods and equipment the new, nationalist Cuban government decided to subordinate Cuba completely to the world market.

This subordination to the world market had two parts. One part was to increase exports. Cuba naturally would rely on producing the export it had a "comparative advantage" in producing—sugar. ("Comparative advantage" is a term bourgeois economists use to designate a product a country knows how to, and can, produce profitably.) **So decades of nationalist denunciation of the sugar economy and its bad effects on Cuba resulted in a nationalist revolution which based itself on extending the sugar economy.** Sugar was—and still is—Cuba's most marketable commodity. (Even today sugar makes up 75% of Cuba's export earnings.)

The other part of the strategy of subordination to the world market was to implement a program of domestic savings: getting the workers to produce more for less, and cutting down on imported consumer goods.

But, as anyone who ever studied the way of a one-crop agricultural country is treated by the world market could have predicted, Cuba developed a large deficit in its balance of payments, which only grew larger as time passed, no matter what the Cubans did. (Not unrelated to this is the fact that one consequence of making market-based exports and imports an important part of a country's overall economy is that this determines that commodity production and the free market will play an important role in the domestic economy as well, either legally, or illegaly as a black market.)

CENTRALIZING THE ECONOMY—BUT IN WHOSE INTEREST?

To enforce the sugar export strategy required that the central authorities have effective control of agriculture. If the first land reform, in 1961, gave some land to farmworkers (who used the land they got to produce food crops mainly for the domestic market, something very beneficial to the workers), a second land reform, in 1963, forced them to produce nothing but sugar for export (something very beneficial to the developing privileged class of ruling officials.)

In every possible way the gov-

ernment forced farmers into sugar cane cultivation. Even the small plots of land previously given to state-employed farmworkers were taken away because they spent "too much time" on them producing food for domestic consumption, time that could be spent cultivating sugar cane for export.

As a result, state-owned land dedicated to sugar production increased by about 38% within the first year of the reform and continued to increase for the remainder of the 1960s.

These reforms were portrayed as hastening the transition from socialism to communism by eliminating private property. In reality the farm workers remained separated from control of their means of production. These changes were aimed at strengthening Cuban state capitalism's ability to export more sugar.

The second aspect of the government's dual strategy for accumulating capital—domestic savings—was implemented in agriculture by mobilizing thousands of urban volunteers to work in the sugar fields. This was portrayed as the way supposedly to start abolishing the distinction between manual and intellectual labor and to emphasize moral over material work incentives, according to communist principles. But nothing of the sort was involved. It was merely a command from the top to the rank and file. In reality it merely maximized sugar earnings by minimizing direct production costs through using unpaid labor. By 1970, more than one third of the labor force worked part time in agriculture.

A NEW WAGE SYSTEM TO OPPRESS WORKERS

Industry had been almost completely nationalized in the first two years following the revolution's 1959 triumph. The government's policy for accumulation of capital as it applied to industry meant producing less to satisfy workers needs while getting them to produce more. Che Guevara, then the Minister of Industry, brought in specialists from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries to help Cuba make the proper adjustments. Thousands of Cuban technicians were trained by these specialists.

The Soviet bloc economic advisers helped develop a national wage system that was implemented in 1962. Its provisions linked wages to the achievement of certain defined standards. Workers not achieving these standards received a salary proportional to what they did produce. Where possible the cruder capitalist method of piece

rates was applied.

In this way an eight-group wage scale was established. Group I was the lowest, and received the minimum wage of 0.48 Cuban peso per hour. Group VIII, the highest, whose work was theoretically 3.08 times more complex (not 3.0 or 3.1, mind you!), earned 3.08 times more, or 1.49 pesos. Close to three-quarters of all workers were classified in the lowest groups I to IV.

These wages were advertised as material incentives designed to motivate the workers to increase production. Propaganda aside, in reality they were measures taken by the government to set up a national labor disciplinary system enforced by wage differences. Rather than help unite the working class to assist it in controlling the means of production, this system was designed to further divide the working class so it could be controlled more easily by the managers and political leaders, and to materially benefit these managers and leaders.

First of all, no system of material incentives could stimulate the Cuban working class to do anything, for the simple reason that there were no consumer goods available to the working class. There was nothing workers could spend money on: 95% of their necessities were rationed. But consumer goods were available to the privileged managers, intellectuals and political leaders. Material incentives were not meaningless to them.

The incentive wage system was actually the prelude to a massive wage cut. Almost three-quarters of the non-agricultural work force already received wages higher than those allowed by this system. These were wages won in bitter class struggle against the bosses who ran Cuba before the Revolution. These wages, called "historic wages," were not lowered by the system because it was politically impossible for the revolutionary government not to respect them. Instead they were later eliminated by the unions.

ATTACKING WORKERS THROUGH 'SACRIFICE'

So, because of the actual impossibility of basing labor discipline on material incentives, between 1962 and 1966 Fidel's government had to rely on "moral incentives" that emphasized sacrificing for the revolution by doing voluntary work, and on "socialist emulation." (Capitalists always fall back on "morality" when they run out of cash.)

Voluntary work and socialist emulation (competition between workers for social recognition—either as individuals or in

groups—for meeting the production goals set for them) were used to mobilize hundreds of thousands of workers to fulfil and overfulfil production plans, save on materials, improve production quality, and increase work discipline.

The Cuban workers of the 1960s were very enthusiastic about moral incentives, and made Che Guevara a popular hero for championing them. Plainly Cuba's working class rejected capitalism.

But now they found themselves in the peculiar dual situation with which socialism confronts workers. Socialism proclaims to the workers that they are society's masters. This should motivate a maximum of effort and sacrifice. That makes sense if the workers feel themselves masters of factory and farm, of the whole production process.

But, on the other hand, since socialism retains the capitalist production relations unchanged, changing merely the ownership forms, the workers really remain wage slaves. For slaves, sacrifice is senseless. The only sensible thing is to reject sacrifice—"Why should we be sacrificed for the sake of production?"—when they realize they are not masters of the production process.

Not to defend individual interest—in this case, to renounce payment of the market-value of your labor—was in Cuba motivated by an egalitarian spirit. But not to defend this individual interest becomes suicidal unless it is accompanied by a working class-based demand for political, economic and cultural power.

As it became clear to the Cuban workers that they remained merely labor-power, that they remained merchandise to be bought and sold, they objected to being further sacrificed, they rejected the "moral incentives," they rejected suicide. Without payment they would not work.

But without a communist leadership among them to help them draw the lessons of their experience, cynicism, political apathy and anti-communism grew. This was the result of a campaign to which initially the Cuban working class responded enthusiastically because it believed it was a rejection of capitalism.

A Cuban university professor confirmed this when she said in 1990: "This idea of [now] motivating workers through moral rather than material incentives is like beating a dead horse. That was useful in the 1960s, when people really believed the rhetoric. But it won't work today." (To which a troubled, sincerely devoted but politically illiterate Cuban journalist responded: "We have to revive the dream.")

These methods fall into the category of "tinkering with management techniques." It was just a way of getting workers voluntarily to step up production within the existing production relations. This is not transforming social or production relations. Although this seems to be a social practice designed to "transform political consciousness," since the exploitative situation the working class finds itself in isn't being attacked, this really just extorts more free labor.

The end result, for the working class, of relying on the socialist religion of "moral incentives" (rather than on materialist class struggle) is greater relative impoverishment, growing cynicism, a turning away from politics and a strengthening of capitalist ideology and practices.

THE REVOLUTION STAGNATES, THE WORKERS KEEP PAYING

From 1962 to 1970 the Cuban economy stagnated in terms of growth, although more was being produced and the working class had more material goods available to it than under the old capitalist regime. Of course nothing had ever advanced on the front of transforming management relations, that is, on the front of ***"who decides"*** what and how to produce.

The revolutionary government never seriously considered a communist strategy of self-sufficient development. It chose to continue the capitalist market-oriented strategy of capital accumulation by producing for export and limiting imports. The strategy seemed radical only because the U.S. imperialist bloc was rejected in favor of the Soviet imperialist bloc. But the relationship between Cuba and imperialism remained the same.

In 1966 the Cuban leadership again emphasized "equality" and moral incentives as a way to get the working class to sacrifice more and to produce more. A resolution passed by the Labor Ministry in 1966 put it this way:

> The advances made by our Socialist Revolution have clearly demonstrated that man (sic) is capable of realizing truly productive feats without requiring the application of wage forms in which the increase in productivity carries with it a higher wage. This reveals that ...payment by output has become ultimately detrimental to the development of a communist consciousness.

Having said these nice words, the Ministry proceeded to force "communist consciousness" along by cutting the wages for all workers (except for the lowest-

paid workers in the state sector.) Average wages for state workers declined 12% between 1966 and 1971. Pay for overtime work was eliminated.

At the same time the government continued to try to reduce its trade imbalance with the Soviets by importing still less. Material consumption for the masses of workers was drastically reduced. During these years per capita consumption of consumer goods was reduced to 91% of the 1961 level.

In other words, Fidel and the Cuban Communist Party were just using communist phrases to cover up an attack on the working class—to squeeze more surplus value out of them in order to pay the Socialist bosses and to accumulate more capital—while giving the impression nationally, and internationally, that they were building "the new man" that Che Guevara talked and wrote about.

Coupled with increases in Soviet aid, the capital saved by applying this austerity program in the name of "communist principles" and from the "free urban labor," the government was able to increase its investment in capital accumulation.

But 1970 was a year of great failure. The regime had targeted a phenomenal increase in sugar production for 1970—a ten million ton harvest—and couldn't pull it off despite mobilizing every possible resource. Fidel faced a serious problem. By his own definition his "revolutionary strategy" had failed. The export strategy was a failure. The working class was disaffected.

The export strategy propounded by this radical nationalist failed because rather than emancipate Cuba from the clutches of the imperialist-dominated world market, where she would forever be exploited, it tied her even more closely to it. Market forces Cuba could not control forced the price of sugar to below two cents a pound between 1966 and 1968. Even at the subsidized prices the USSR paid, the revenue generated was not enough.

AFTER 10 YEARS THE WORKERS HAD ENOUGH

The working class was disenchanted because although the state talked a great deal about communism, its policies of capital accumulation and refusal to lead class struggle to transform social relations were in direct contradiction to the need of the workers to improve their lives and to exercise their control over the work process. But the regime's revolutionary socialist rhetoric confused and disoriented workers on this matter.

What was crystal clear however, was that while the working class possessed more than 3.3 billion pesos—more than an entire year's wages for the whole working class—they could buy nothing, and had to tighten their belts. But the upper echelons of labor, government and Party officials had easy access to scarce goods and services.

The revolution's failure was reflected in the working class, therefore, not by rebellion, which requires political clarity and leadership, but by demoralization, cynicism, by a turning away from politics, and by disgust at what was perceived as corruption. There was a society-wide growth of individualism and hypocrisy practiced through such acts as loyal revolutionaries trafficking on the black market, or stealing supplies from work to use privately, or hiring labor, or staying away from work.

By 1968 a study of more than 200 enterprises revealed that up to one half of the workday was wasted largely due to poor discipline. After the failed 1970 sugar harvest general absenteeism from work rose to 20% daily. Workers' productivity—the government's main concern—declined: in 1966, for each peso paid in wages, a production of 1.58 pesos was obtained; in 1970 this fell to 1.38 pesos, a decline of 48% in the surplus value.

What conclusion did the Cuban leadership draw from its success in building a real, if illegal, market economy, and its failure to lead a real advance toward communism? Its conclusion was that it was all the workers' fault. Communist consciousness was too "leftist." The workers weren't ready for communism. The leaders, in Fidel's words, "suffered from errors of...idealistically interpreting Marxism...[in]...approaching communist forms of production and distribution..."

Fidel decided that he had misestimated how much sugar he could profitably sell to accumulate the capital he wanted for investment. Though he lowered his sales and growth goals, he still had to generate a surplus of production over consumption. So if he couldn't rely so much on squeezing the market, he had to rely even more on squeezing the workers. The policy of increasing domestic savings and improving workers' productivity became even more important. The problem he faced was the old one: how to get the workers to produce more.

MORE EFFICIENT OPPRESSION OF THE WORKERS

Since, as he saw it, the workers had resisted the government's "push toward communism," he now decided to rely on the managers. A system was devised of material incentives mainly for the benefit of directors and managers, who by this time had crystallized into a distinct social stratum with considerable power. and to more systematically enforce fascist-style centralized authoritarianism over the working class. In short, the Cubans for the next fifteen years closely copied Soviet and Eastern European practices. (It went so far that Fidel, famous for his off-the-cuff speeches, now took to reading from a prepared text.)

Thousands of time-and-motion experts and technicians were trained and sent into workplaces in order to "achieve the maximum utilization of human resources, increase productivity, and minimize cost." By 1973, standards of productivity and quality had been administratively assigned to two million workers (82% of state workers).

At the same time membership in the Communist Party was vastly expanded, going from 50,000 to 500,000. This facilitated the consolidation of the new ruling class since the party was basically a vehicle for organizing the privileged stratum and apportioning privilege and power. (Apart from this vital function the party has no real inner life, its life consisting as it does of innumerable meetings, all devoid of any meaningful discussion or decision-making. The Cubans have a word for this—"meetingism"—"reunismo" in Spanish.)

The trade unions were given a key role in the Cuban bosses' plans to discipline the workers and get them to produce more. For this purpose unions were expanded. The old union officials most closely identified with the previous economic policies were dumped. Over 26,000 new union locals were established and local union elections were held in which 87% of the almost 118,000 officials elected were brand new in the job. Unions were given a seat on management boards, so as to share responsibility for, and lay a basis for claiming the workers were involved in, setting wage policies and production standards.

To mobilize the workers, unions began to have regular meetings, at which were discussed such issues as how to meet quality, savings, and production quotas. The main purpose behind these meetings was to get

the workers to feel they had helped decide the policies.

In this way the unions played a decisive role in getting workers to accept wage cuts and speedup. In 1973 the VIII Congress of Cuban Workers "demanded":

> start paying wages again according to the quantity and quality of work done by each worker, cancel the practice of paying outstanding workers 100% of their wages when they were absent or retired, the gradual elimination of 'historical wages', and the perfection of labor standards to better stimulate productivity.

Fidel also decided to use fascism more openly to force workers into obedience in case everything else failed. In 1971 he enacted the Compulsory Work Law, which made work (for men) an obligation in addition to a "socialist right." This law stipulated that workers guilty of absenteeism were to be deprived of vacations, excluded from social benefits, and in severe cases, transferred to work camps. The law helped reduce absenteeism and forced some previously unproductive workers to join the work force.

But despite this law, and the tangle of "rights" and "obligations," nationwide unemployment in 1970—before the law existed, when work was merely a "right"—was 1.3%. In 1981, when the economy was booming, and work was both a "right" and an "obligation", officially-admitted unemployment had grown to 3.4%. The lesson is that capitalism requires unemployment, no matter what laws it passes.

There is no doubt that the Compulsory Work Law, the speed up introduced by the time-and-motion experts, the material benefits given to successful managers, the tease of material rewards for workers who sacrificed, and the imaginary control that workers were given over the work process had a positive effect on productivity.

Productivity increased sharply. In 1972, for example, the output per worker jumped 21%.

The contribution of the time-and-motion experts was especially dramatic. A study of 500 work centers showed that they were able to reduce employment by 6% over a three year period.

FASCIST CARICATURE OF PARIS COMMUNE

In 1975 the Organs of People's Power (OPP) were created. They are legislative bodies and seemingly also have responsibility for the administration of local service, trade and industrial operations accounting for 34% of all Cuban enterprises. Local OPPs were supposed to have

some input about the choice and priority of projects and about naming or replacing enterprize directors nominally under their control. Meetings are usually taken up with discussions of bureaucratic deficiencies, including consumer scarcities and complaints about urban services. In short, these are caricatures of the Paris Commune, which was based on nationally coordinated, locally-based power and responsibility, and from which "communism" takes its name.

But in the Cuban version, by contrast, these OPPs were ultimately responsible to JUCEPLAN (the state planning agency). From their inception they were criticized for being impotent at the local level and unrepresentative at the national level. Many delegates to the national assembly of People's Power are actually from Havana, but represent towns or cities in other provinces about which they know very little.

Cuba is an example of the fact that if the relationship between the center and the base takes the form of a strict top-down chain of command, then the mechanisms of capitalist society will be reproduced. The local base unit—whether a factory or farm or office—will operate simply as the basic cell in a despotic body. If this basic cell is given a relative autonomy in self-management subject to rigid central control over production plans, then its reproduction of capitalist-style despotism will be intensified. After all, this is how the modern corporation functions. So this is the way to despotism via decentralization.

In other words, it is wrong to argue that the struggle of centralism against decentralism is the same as the struggle for working class control of society. By themselves structures determine nothing. The working class can be oppressed in a decentralized as well as a centralized way. The structure most beneficial to the working class is democratic centralism, but only because this structure makes it easier to struggle for working class control of society, and not because it automatically guarantees such control.

A former delegate to one of the OPPs in Havana commented in 1990:

> What's missing from the People's Power is the power. People would come to see us and lodge scores of complaints, which I would run around trying to solve. But I didn't have the authority to solve the problems, not even a problem like getting a stop sign put in at a busy street corner, or ensuring better service at the local pizzeria. So people starting blaming me when the solutions were out of my hands.

Behind this smoke screen of "People's Power" is hidden the real purpose of the OPPs: to mobilize the masses, to strengthen mass satisfaction with the regime, which is in all respects alienated from the masses. This is a traditional authoritarian political technique, a technique whose use was especially characteristic of fascist regimes.

THE LEGAL MARKET ECONOMY WAS EVEN WORSE THAN THE BLACK MARKET

The years between 1970-86 were years of intensifying capitalist development fostering growing working class alienation. The "New System of Economic Management and Planning (SDPE)" which the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party copied in 1975 from the 1965 Soviet economic "reforms" turned out to be a disaster even in their own terms. "According to the system," a Cuban economist explained 15 years later, "workers' salaries were supposed to be linked to their output, but workplace norms would be lowered so that output would look high and everyone would receive bonuses. The result was...a decline in productivity..."

In some areas the result was even worse for the new ruling class than low productivity—no productivity. The hierarchical spirit so permeated the elitist educational system of this "socialist revolution" that very soon a labor shortage developed in some sectors because young educated Cubans felt they were too good for manual labor. The construction industry was especially hard-hit by this ideological epidemic. Since Cuba's bosses were in no position to import, say, Turkish or Bangladeshi or Palestinian workers to do their dirty work, this was a serious problem.

Even among the new ruling groups the SDPE wrecked havoc. The SDPE re-established some of the free market capitalist practices that the government had eliminated when the state capitalist system was introduced in 1961. Some of SDPE's measures were:

- Individuals were allowed to purchase a license from the state to offer services such as appliance and auto repair work, carpentry, plumbing and so on, on a self-employed basis. Only services that did not conflict with planned state activity were licensed. In the first month 2,000 people took out licenses to be peddlers in Havana alone. By 1981 private contracting cooperatives were building 38% of the new housing units.

But a problem the private producers had was that they had no way to buy raw materials. After the state-owned enterprises bought what they needed (and they had priority), there was nothing left. So the private producers simply stole what they needed.

•The government permitted the remaining 35,000 private farmers to sell to the public at whatever price they could get any output that exceeded the quotas that had to be delivered to the state. This increase in consumer goods on the market made more attractive the development policy based on material incentives, since there might now be something to buy.

At first the government claimed this free market policy was responsible for big increases in the production of vegetables, rice, beans and pork. Years later (10 years later) when the policy changed, the government claimed there really had been no increase at all in total production. Instead, the farmers withheld produce they should have sold to the state at low prices, which would have benefitted everyone, and sold it instead on the free market for high prices, which benefitted only themselves.

Now the combined result of this was the following. On the one hand a new privileged group was in formation whose existence was defined by owning wealth in money, and who could possibly become politically powerful because of this wealth. This threatened the ruling group whose privileges were secured not by wealth, but by monopolization of power.

On the other hand this new privileged class produced, by its very appearance, significant discontent among the working people, who opposed inequality, (although, paradoxically, they accepted being paid according to work done, which produces inequality). But the wealth of these private businessmen seemed to emerge from stealing and swindling, not from working, and worst—they were a product of the revolution's policies.

Finally, to the extent the farmers developed their private production, the economy passed out of the government's direct control. Very rapidly the farmers started diversifying their production, cutting back on sugar cane, for which the state paid a low price, and growing what they could sell at a high price on the free markets. This directly threatened the capital accumulation strategy which was the underpinning for the existence of the entire new ruling class.

Sugar exports remained crucial to capital accumulation. After the crisis caused by the failure of the 1970 10-million-ton target, production goals were lowered. But now there was a serious push for mechanization, to increase the surplus value produced by the sugar workers. Cuba now produces a lot of sugar with far fewer workers, having thus increased the rate of exploitation of the sugar workers.

In 1975, 25% of cane cutting and 95% of loading were mechanized. By 1981 46% of the cutting was mechanized as was 97.% of the loading. By 1985 62% of the cutting was mechanized and 100% of the loading was mechanized. This drastically cut down the number of cane cutters: in the 1960s there were 350,000 cane cutters, in 1980, 144,000 and in 1985, 72,000. Productivity of cane cutters is high, reaching a record in 1985 of 3.76 tons per worker per day.

THE BOSSES REWARD THEMSELVES FOR THEIR HARD WORK

This free market policy couldn't last once the new ruling stratum realized what was happening. But before they realized the extent of the new problems they had caused themselves, they were delighted with what they thought were the results of their policy. So in 1980 they decided to reward themselves.

In 1980 the Second Congress of the Cuban Communist Party decided to introduce the "General Reform of Wages and Prices" to "stimulate an increase in labor productivity, a decrease in cost of production, and to improve discipline."

"Here No One Surrenders. Commander In Chief, Give Us Our Orders"

To accomplish this it was decided to increase the highest wages, those paid to motivate enterprize directors and skilled personnel. The minimum wage was increased, but more importantly, the spread between the highest and the minimum wage was increased. The highest wage now was 5.29 times the minimum wage. The spread had been 3.08. *So this was a 71% increase in planned inequality and privilege.*[2]

THE RECTIFICATION CAMPAIGN

by 1984 a disturbing result was discovered in the Cuban economy as a result of all these "successes." The production of its key export, sugar, had fallen 700,000 tons below plan. Its two other important exports, nickel and citrus production also declined. The volume of imports had increased. Cuba's leaders also discovered they couldn't sell their products for much. They had priced their goods in U.S. dollars, but now, because of the weak U.S. economy the dollar fell drastically in value, giving the Cubans a big loss. What they imported rose not only in volume, but also in price. To top things off, hurricanes and drought wiped out their harvests. All of a sudden Cuba's hard currency earnings fell 27%. The Cubans couldn't pay their debts any better than could the Mexicans or Brazilians.

Responding to these problems, the Third Party Congress, held in December, 1985, launched the "Rectification of Errors and Struggle Against Negative Tendencies" campaign, which still continues. The errors and bad

2 In actual effect, the spread between lower and higher paid workers is even greater. The privileged life style is actually determined by how much money one has left over *after* meeting one's basic needs. Take a hypothetical case of a worker who makes $10 an hour and one who makes $15 an hour. After taxes and monthly living expenses, the worker earning $10 an hour might have $100 left over. If the worker earning $15 an hour has the same living costs, the money he or she has left over would be $700. Even though one worker makes only half as much more than the other (the same as 50% more), in reality—in terms of being able to afford a more privileged life style—this worker is making **seven times more (the same as 700% more)** than the other worker. Imagine what this planned 71% increase in privilege meant to the Cuban working people.

tendencies in question were obviously those of the working class, since the campaign's main aims were to tighten up quality controls and work norms, and emphasize the work ethic, (and also to weed out corrupt administrators.)

The Construction Ministry, responsible for implementing investment decisions, became the main target of Rectification. The construction industry had been a fiasco. Hundreds of important projects begun between 1976 and 1986 were never completed. Buildings were left half done, bridges went up without connecting roads; housing was built far away from jobs, transport and services.

The Third Party Congress concluded that this happened because "any given construction project was wrapped up in a bureaucratic nightmare—taking orders from dozens of ministries and companies concerned only with their own economic plans, figures and pay bonuses." "Success was judged by what profits appeared on the books and not tied to quality, overall efficiency and actual completion of a project." "Productivity was low because management paid too little attention to forming healthy labor relations and working conditions."

CUBA'S CONSTRUCTION CONTINGENTS

The leadership's solution was two-fold. First, eliminate the "bureaucratic nightmare" by centralizing production (although the "nightmare" seems to be less bureaucratic than political—the leadership's frenzied attempt to exploit the workers so as to earn profits to pay management bonuses.) Second, set up little construction companies, which they call "construction contingents," to increase labor productivity, decrease losses and expenses caused by unproductive time, and provide a better mechanism to implement material and moral incentives.

(Also in 1986 special commissions were sent around the world, from the USSR to Japan, from Canada to Western Europe, in search of the most "modern" managerial techniques to be applied to Cuba's socialist enterprises—as if management has no class power implications.)

A construction contingent is made up of brigades. A brigade is a stable group of workers, chosen for their loyalty to the revolution's leadership. Loyalty to the leadership is considered proof of your "communist ideology."

("I don't understand what's

happening in the world," an old militant is quoted as telling a reporter recently. "I don't even know what communism is anymore. But one thing I do know. I'm 100% fidelista.")

Everything about these contingents reeks of disguised capitalist super-exploitation. This is graphically illustrated by the following excerpt from a 1989 interview with "national hero" Candido Palmero, head of the most famous contingent, the "Blas Roca":

We are building a five-star hotel, a first in Cuba. You find us in agricultural work, building four huge refrigeration centers,...facilities for 1991 Pan American Games,...[He cites dozens of other projects.]

The contingent is responsible for each project—from breaking the ground to putting on the last coat of paint. In the past all sorts of ministries and companies were involved. Now it is just us. We bring in the equipment and supplies while each brigade, operating like a mini-company, is responsible for the particular project and is free to make decisions as it sees fit.

Performance is measured on strict accounting, maximum use of equipment, job completion and quality of work....They know the cost down to the last penny. They know what they have produced that particular day. Furthermore nobody has just one skill or sits around if his equipment has broken down. We've all mastered more than one job so a minute is never wasted.

The most important thing about all this is not the work itself. Fidel has spent a lot of time with us designing the contingents, trying to find a higher communist way of work. He says we are a kind of laboratory for the entire country and we have changed all the rules.

First, everyone here has volunteered for the job. They apply at the work place and are then selected to represent their co-workers in this mass mobilization. Some 85 percent of our people are not professional construction workers, but come from all walks of life. As a mobilization, the requirements to work here center on the motivation to help the country and our people, not simply to earn more money.

When we formed the first brigade we told Fidel that we would not collect pay bonuses of any kind, including overtime pay after 8 hours. He flatly rejected that on the grounds that we should be paid according to our work. So when we work for 15 hours we get paid for 15 hours.

But don't think that any one works 374 hours a month for the money. We do this for honor, pride and our country. We work 14 hours a day, six days a week and every other Sunday. But everyone volunteers on that day off as well.

When problems crop up, we don't apply national work rules. We resolve them through the collective. And this includes labor discipline issues. For example, the problem is discussed, a course of action is voted on and there's no appeal. We have had success with this approach to date. We have good discipline, upheld by the collective.

Workers with the best records are rewarded on the job and in the community. Their neighbors, family, children learn about what this person has done for the country and special recognition is paid at the block association meetings.

Again, nobody works this hard just for the pay. For the last two years, we have tripled the national average productivity rate.

Management is kept down to a minimum and is out there working like everyone else 14 hours a day.

The contingent receives the best medical care Cuba's socialist medical system can provide and this attention to 'the individual's well being' is key to ideological and political work. It also includes two balanced hot meals a day, air conditioning, color TV's and videos in the workers' lounges, and drawing the family into the contingent's social life.

To understand why the Cuban ruling class is so happy with these contingents, consider this: In 1989, the average Cuban construction worker earned 4,000 pesos a year and produced 7,000 pesos in value. From a capitalist's viewpoint (and this is how the Cubans develop their statistics) this represents a labor cost of 57%. From a working class standpoint, this is a wage of about 2 pesos an hour, and an exploitation rate of 75%.

Contingent members, however, earned 5 to 6,000 pesos a year. *This seems to be more money, but is actually a 33% pay cut, representing an hourly wage of about 1.33 pesos.*

The contingent members produced 16 to 20,000 pesos per year in value. As the bosses look at it therefore, the contingent form of production involved an average labor cost of less than 40%, or a saving of almost 30% from the traditional way of doing things.

Again, from the working class standpoint, the contingent members were exploited at a rate 210% more than the traditional construction workers, for which privilege they were given 50% more money.

What is communist about this "higher communist way of work?"

☐ The plan is decided on by the Ministry.

☐ The brigade's leadership is chosen by the Ministry.

☐ The workers are chosen by

management from a pool of physically-able volunteers motivated by some combination of the desire to have access to more goods, and patriotism.

☐ Production and profitability standards are defined by the Ministry.

☐ Operational autonomy in carrying out the Ministry's plan is decentralized to the brigade level.

☐ If Ministry standards are met by the workers they earn 50% more in total money wages than other workers doing the same work, plus they get other benefits not otherwise available to workers.

☐ Individualism is the key to the movement's politics and ideological training.

☐ The gains Cuba's workers have won in health and job safety standards, as well as in general working conditions, don't apply on these jobs. Speedup is a mild word to describe what goes on. Labor discipline is strict, top-down and without appeal. Work is so intense, and of such long duration—a workday runs from 7 in the morning to 9 at night, every day of the week, no days off—that only the healthiest and strongest could endure it. For being born healthy and strong they become a privileged caste.

This is hardly a movement toward working class empowerment. In fact, what is the difference between this and the most exploitative capitalism? Where is the revolution of the old working relations into communist production relations? Where is the production of intelligence and culture? Where is the criticism of elitism and of profit-making?

A COMPARISON WITH THE CUBAN MODEL

Contrast this Cuban experience (if you can) with the following experience, on which the Cuban plan seems to be based. If the Cubans are carrying on a "higher communist way of work" what follows must be "advanced communism":

The...workers work in production teams of about thirty people, all of whom are responsible for the efficiency of the team. The rules are strict, verging on ruthless. The pressure to keep up production comes from the rules, and the rules are enforced by the production team itself. If one member of the team is late for work or doesn't show up, the paychecks of all thirty members of the team can be damaged that week. The reaction to absenteeism...is swift and unpleasant, and come from other members of the production team rather than from management. Members who become sick may try to struggle through a day's work, for fear of hurting or irritating their fellow-members. If a member is thought by others to be lazy, they nag him and lecture him, and if he doesn't take to lectures they get him fired...

During a factory startup, the production teams gradually take control of the factory. The teams themselves begin to decide who will stay with the team and who will be fired. Plenty of people are fired..."If there's one guy in a group who isn't doing well, the others train him or get rid of him," [the company president] said...One time, some members of a team in a...plant reportedly chased a guy around the plant with an angle iron...

The worker's wage has recently been...equal to unionized worker's pay. Unlike a union wage,[this company's] wage is more bonus than anything else...If they [produce] a lot...they also made good money. "We're against labor unions," [the company president] said. "It's not the union pay scale that we object to; it's the work rules."

This is a from a report on the viciously anti-labor, unsafe, air polluting Nucor Corporation, the tenth largest U.S. steel producer, which in 1988 owned 22 plants in the U.S. and sold $850 million worth of goods, for a net profit of $50 million. (*The New Yorker*, February 25, 1991, page 64.)

In 1990 an investigator sympathetic to the Cuban leadership had this to say about the Rectification campaign:

The construction industry aside, it is hard to get a sense of what rectification has meant. In interview after interview, government officials repeated generalizations about greater efficiency, less bureaucracy, less corruption and higher worker morale. But many workers I spoke with saw no change, and it is not yet clear whether productivity levels have improved...One person I interviewed, a university professor...who participated in numerous studies of the Cuban economy...told me in confidence: "For most Cubans the rectification campaign is a big joke. Sure, a few corrupt administrators were kicked out, but there are plenty more bad apples where they came from. The level of productivity is abysmal and the bureaucracy is still maddening." ("Things Fall Apart," in *NACLA*, August 1990, page 18.)

APARTHEID TOURISM

Rhetoric aside, Rectification is a desperate attempt by the fidelista ruling clique to try to survive in the crisis-ridden world capitalist system. Full blown market capitalism in the former Socialist bloc means big problems for Fidel's state capitalism. Everything will be bought and sold for hard currency, something Cuba has very little of. Fidel will have to prostitute the Cuban working class on the free market even more to try to get the desperately needed hard currency.

Part of Fidel's solution is to develop the Cuban tourist industry into a hard currency earner equal to the sugar industry. The industry will eventually employ 250,000 workers. Rectification has given his plan a tremendous boost. Construction contingents are building thousands of tourist quarters in record time, while hundreds of thousands of volunteers are hard at work renovating and beautifying the cities.

Cuban tourism under Fidel won't be much different from Cuban tourism under Batista. The bosses' faces have changed—that's all. Fidel has replaced Batista and Mexican and Spanish businessmen have replaced the U.S. bosses. But the relationship is the same. The foreign bosses can own 51% of the hotels and can export all their profits. Fidel has given them the power to suspend or fire workers, while stripping workers of the right to appeal to the Workers Council (elected workers' officials who are supposed to deal with labor grievances.) Workers in this industry can now appeal only through the formal judicial system.

Officially sanctioned prostitution is bound to follow. *Playboy* magazine recently made an officially authorized trip to Cuba to photograph one of their specialized soft-core porn spreads on Cuban women. This is intended to help tourism. Gambling can't be far behind.

Inequality has taken a qualitative leap forward—South African style. The Cuban working class has no access to the facilities used by the tourists, including the beaches. The workers have a name for this racist discrimination. They call it "apartheid tourism."

One thing is certain: complete free market capitalism is eventually bound to come to Cuba as it did to the other Socialist countries. As the different privileged groups inside Cuba reach maturity, they will inevitably demand the free market and the multiparty system, since these are the best arenas for them to vie for wealth and power.

From the Cuban experience we see that at best socialism produces state ownership of the means of production. This is merely a legal transformation of ownership relations. It is not yet an overall transformation of social relations, an ending to elitism, hierarchy, racism, sexism. There is no transformation particularly of those relations within which production is carried out.

Communism involves a radical transformation of the process of social production. This transformation is the result of

purposeful, unified, collective struggle by the working people for this end. This is a class struggle, which in the end comes to supersede the state and ends the state's existence.

But to carry through this class struggle, the working people must reject nonproletarian ideologies. Such ideologies divide them, and make possible the reproduction of exploitative relations. So long as ideas deriving from the ideology of an exploiting class continue to exist, the workers can be divided and there can be private appropriation by an exploiting class. This is true no matter what legal form this private appropriation takes—whether within state ownership or collective ownership. (From the viewpoint of the exploiting class within socialism, the best form is that one which is best disguised and parades most effectively as private appropriation's opposite.)

Neither in Cuba, nor in any other socialist society, did social transformation advance beyond the formal, legal stage (except briefly in China in the 1960s.) The relationship of class forces within socialism bars the path to successful class struggle for continuing, more radical social transformation. Nonproletarian ideology cannot be rejected by the working people because they are told it is proletarian ideology by the very leaders and parties they regard as leading the proletarian cause.

This is what happened, and is still continuing to happen, in Cuba. The situation is unstable, and in any case the existing system can't last long.

Even if the Cuban workers wish no more than to keep the radical reforms brought them by the revolution, even if they wish no more than to avoid the East German-type catastrophe of massive unemployment, and the destruction of the health care, housing, education, and welfare programs they worked so hard to create, they have only one option: Organize their own revolutionary communist party and fight for an egalitarian, self-sufficient, communist Cuba.

Primitive communism was a product of necessity and it was enforced by scarcity. But modern communism is a product of consciousness—the mass communist consciousness of the world's working class—and is required if humanity is to live a life of abundance. Communism can only be achieved by fighting for it before, during and after the revolution.

By M.C. and B.T.